Fowl
Feathered
Review
№ 184

Issue № 184: Generalities! They're everywhere! Everywhere!

Fowl Feathered Review is a quarterly, a disordered artifact of the human impulse to categorize and consume the ephemeral. Produced by the Springwound Mammoth Pancake Coalition—an entity distinct from its waffle-centric counterpart—it is birthed under the Fowlpox Press imprint. Virgil Kay, its editor, presides over this enterprise from a paper canoe adrift on the Passagassawakeag, a river of dubious depth and even more dubious inhabitants. Surrounded by featherheads and their aquatic card games, Kay's reign is absolute, his word the final arbiter in the transformation of boastful souls into doormats. Layout and visual conceits are the province of Cookie Granola, while melodrama and histrionics fall under the purview of Childe Harold. Silent Bill, in his characteristically taciturn manner, provides necessary pauses. The review's structural integrity, or lack thereof, is the domain of Unkie Bob, whose talents extend to the mitigation of typographical errors and the prevention of electrical conflagrations. Everett Enótita serves as Kay's indispensable amanuensis, and the Ecum Secum Literary Brain Trust, in a gesture of dubious beneficence, offers nominal financial support. Printed upon the verdant expanse of Bald Porcupine Island, and laced with the enigmatic Kraa, a bioengineered culinary enigma, the Fowl Feathered Review remains a testament to human ingenuity, or perhaps merely a symptom of cultural decline. ISSN: 1929-7238.

"I am an observer of life, a non-participant who takes no sides. I am in the regimented society, but not of it."

--Moondog, The Viking of 6th Avenue

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If this magazine does not meet your expectations,
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Submissions

Fowlpox Press: A Submission Guide for the Determined (or Deluded)
To the Aspiring Artist (or Sandwich Enthusiast):

1. **Craft** (or **Culinary Construct**): 2-227 poems, a numerical range that hints at both ambition and a troubling lack of self-editing, may find their way to our digital doorstep (fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com). Alternatively, for the visually inclined, paintings numbered 2-953 (a prolific career, or perhaps a basement overflowing with forgotten canvases?) are welcome. We are also, inexplicably, open to submissions of twelve-inch sandwiches.
2. **The Gatekeeper:** Address your offerings to Virgil Kay, Editor. In posession of remarkably discerning taste, or so he believes, Virgil is a rooster of some renown, a creature of instinct and inexplicable confidence. His title, “China Wok Habitue,” suggests a broader palate than one might expect from a bird, though it’s more likely a testament to the local takeout joint’s generous portions. (**Please note:** Include a bio, a desperate plea for recognition that will likely join the unread masses in the digital purgatory of our slush pile.)
3. **Format:** Poems, those valiant attempts at capturing the human experience in meter and rhyme, should be attached in a Word document or PDF. Paintings, windows into your soul (or a weekend spent with Bob Ross reruns), must be submitted in JPEG, TIFF, or a format our aging technology can comprehend. Jokes, if they exist, should be delivered in MP3 format. We are, alas, not equipped to handle the nuanced art of the live performance. Sandwiches, a curious offering in the realm of artistic expression, require clear plastic wrapping and a small packet of Kewpie Mayonnaise. (**Pro-tip:** The Kewpie packaging is, undeniably, a work of art in its own right, and we encourage you to admire it before consumption.)
4. **The Cycle Continues:** We exist in a perpetual state of acceptance and rejection. A Sisyphean task, some might say. We receive submissions 365 days a year, a testament to the relentless hope, or perhaps blissful ignorance, of aspiring artists. However, with a heavy heart (and a full crop), we must inform you that rejections also occur 365 days a year.
5. **The Sandwiches:** Ah, the sandwiches. These, unlike your artistic endeavors, find a permanent home within our editorial sanctum. Virgil, in his infinite wisdom, has determined that a diet rich in carbohydrates is essential for maintaining his regal demeanor.
6. **Leap Year Follies:** Leap years, those extra days gifted by the whims of the calendar, offer no reprieve. Aspiring poets, it seems, are undeterred by such temporal anomalies. You are, however, cordially invited to "take a flying leap" during these additional 24 hours.

Please proceed with caution. Artistic aspirations are a delicate dance, and the path to publication is littered with the fallen hopes of countless dreamers. But hey, maybe your sandwich is killer. Just remember, Kewpie or bust.

Fowl Feathered Review | Poets & Writers (pw.org)

"Non ignora mali, miseris succurrere disco."
— Virgil, The Aeneid

THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE CORROSIVE CROONER: A DEPUTY'S DISPATCH FROM THE DUNGEON OF DISBELIEF

BY KIKI EVELINA GEORGAKI

Deputy Prog reporting for duty here at State Correctional Institution at Graterford, Pennsylvania. From my vantage point, I've had the distinct pleasure of observing my neighbor and best friend, Silas. He's a literary archivist whose personal presentation suggests a profound disinterest in societal norms, akin to a raccoon in its natural, untamed state. He possesses an almost academic fascination with obscure jesters, and his hosiery situation remains a perpetual enigma. His current fixation, a quest for the spectral echo of the Green Monkey—a busker whose existence is verified only by mutable polaroids and the highly specialized gossip of pigeons with advanced degrees in semiotics—is the subject of this unfolding narrative. One might say it resonates with the discordant yet strangely compelling quality of a phantom accordion.

ACT I: THE EMAIL THAT SCREAMED "YELLOW FRUIT" (WITH A POSTSCRIPT IN BRAILLE)

The digital communication arrived with an auditory intensity far beyond a mere notification, a veritable banshee wail that resonated through Silas's workstation. The subject line, 'Regarding the Yellow Fruit,' was accompanied by an image of such optical ambiguity it bordered on the metaphysical. It depicted an individual, possibly in a green fedora or perhaps a naturalistic moss-covered headpiece, engaged in a vocalization,

surrounded by avian companions equipped with miniature stringed instruments. This, Silas deduced, was the Green Monkey, a figure of significant mythological import, known for his vocal performances on urban grates, his voice possessing a corrosive quality capable of stripping historical pigment from masterworks. Unverified reports suggest his genesis in a Czechoslovakian circus during a meteorological disturbance, his formative years influenced by hallucinogenic spirits and avant-garde philosophies, and his subsequent expulsion for imparting Wittgensteinian principles to a psittacine.

Silas's desk, a testament to his unique intellectual pursuits, contained, among other artifacts: a stress ball sculpted to resemble Kafka's facial hair; a receptacle designated 'Regret (Pre- and Post-Election Variants)'; and a scholarly work titled, 'Shakespearean Insults for the Modern Age: "Thou Art a Milk-Livered, Under-Powered, Half-Witted, Sausage-Fingered Lout."'

It is my professional assessment that the Green Monkey's fedora transcends mere headwear; it functions as a cultural counter-hegemonic statement. The curvature of its brim, one might observe, mirrors the arc of post-colonial resistance narratives.
Our Fave Sock Puppet, Dame Alice, Curmudgeon of the Cloth, interjected, 'Oh, spare me the 'cultural counter-hegemony' balderdash! Last week, I saw a man try to glue his eyebrows to a passing trolley. That's DIY. This Monkey? He probably just smelled like burnt sage and expired coupons.'

ACT II: THE ARCHIVE OF AIR, OR HOW HISTORY EATS ITS CHILDREN (WITH A SIDE OF PICKLED HERRING)

Silas initiated his investigative protocol in a sub-level repository, the olfactory profile of which suggested a blend of fungal growth and preserved memories, navigating through a container labeled 'Unsorted Zines (Handle With Existential Despair).' Within this collection, he located Toxic Banana #3, its cover a composite of distressed bananas and a declarative statement titled 'Smuggle Love into Prisons via Origami Swans (Step 1: Bribe the Warden's Iguana).' The interior contained a recipe for 'Borscht for the Soul-

Weary,' necessitating 7 tablespoons of regret, and a schematic for constructing a 'Papier-Mâché Utopia (Explosions Optional).'

An anecdotal account, purportedly from a janitorial staff member in 1980s Prague, describes the Monkey performing with a dental-based harmonica in a Žižkov basement.

The walls, it is claimed, exhibited literal sanguine exudation. By dawn, the entire audience had reportedly developed branchial respiration.
The Flaubertian Detailer, a colleague of mine, would undoubtedly emphasize the man's fedora: its sweatband, a testament to red wine and the residual ash of forgotten aspirations. The stitching, a cartographic representation of Atlantis. The brim, curved with the unsettling mirth of a hyena who has achieved a momentary glimpse of the divine.

ACT III: THE SEMIOTICS OF THE SMIRK, OR HOW A CLOWN'S INNER LIFE INFORMS THE UNIVERSE (BRIEFLY)

Silas's internal jester, Bibo the Melancholic, was reportedly a byproduct of a seance that deviated from its intended parameters. At the age of 14, he ingested a synthetic poultry item, subsequently regurgitating it as a pamphlet titled 'Anarchist

Mimes: Why We Must All Stop Talking Immediately.' Critics posited that Bibo's physical comedy could induce seismic activity; his adherents maintained that his lachrymal secretions were distillations of mythical equine sorrow.

A documented extraordinary feat: In a contest of comedic performance, Bibo successfully outperformed three separate circus ensembles while simultaneously reciting the Iliad in reverse Esperanto.
The Wrightian Oracle, another of my associates, would pronounce, 'The truth isn't buried. It's hiding. With good reason.'

Our Fave Sock Puppet, Dame Alice, Curmudgeon of the Cloth, retorted, 'Authenticity? Honey, I once watched a man eat a lightbulb to win a bet. You think that's 'authentic'? No. It's a colonoscopy waiting to happen.'

ACT IV: THE LOST BALLADS OF BABEL, OR WHEN YIDDISH PIGEONS ATTACK

The Green Monkey's public performances constituted a Tower of Babel reboot, during which he vocalized: Yiddish lullabies directed at agitated corvids; the Marseillaise conveyed via Morse code through axillary sound production; and a Sumerian dirge, reportedly acquired through psychographic means.

An anecdotal account from 1992 claims the Monkey once performed a dialect spoken exclusively by sentient jellyfish. The reported outcome: 14 audience members spontaneously developed branchial respiration.

The linguistic polyphony, or perhaps cacophony, inherent in these performances speaks to a deconstruction of prescribed communicative structures. The dissemination of radical literature within penal institutions, while perhaps unsettling to some, is a testament to the indomitable human spirit's yearning for enlightenment, however unconventional its source.

Our Fave Sock Puppet, Dame Alice, Curmudgeon of the Cloth, scoffed, 'Enlightenment? Please. They're passing zines through air vents because they're bored stiff and the library's got nothing but self-help books and old Reader's Digests. Probably the same guy who tried to sing 'La Marseillaise' and just ended up sounding like a dying cat.'

ACT V: THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE MYTH, OR HOW THE UNIVERSE HATES YOU (BUT SENDS CONDOLENCES)

Did the Green Monkey achieve apotheosis in a vortex of celebratory paper fragments? Or was his corporeal form repurposed into a floor covering? Eyewitnesses maintain his last known location was a second-hand retail establishment, where he was attempting to divest himself of a dental-based harmonica.

The final public performance, according to eyewitness accounts: The Monkey engaged in the aerial manipulation of ignited implements, while a synchronized chorus of squirrels intoned 'Carpe Diem.' The performance venue was a waste receptacle. The audience consisted of three raccoons and an individual claiming to be the spectral manifestation of Abraham Lincoln.

A Pirsigian Inquiry would ask: What is 'Quality' if its existence can be terminated by mechanical excavation? I, Deputy Prog, experienced a profound emotional response, classifying it as 'a tragedy of cosmic mismanagement.'
Our Fave Sock Puppet, Dame Alice, Curmudgeon of the Cloth, delivered her verdict: 'He was a man. With a hat. The bulldozer? It was just tired of his noise. And honestly? Me too.'

ACT VI: THE EDITOR'S SONG, OR EBULLIENT RHUBARB AND OTHER LIES

Silas, now attired in a jacket fabricated from pages of Toxic Banana, vocalized maritime chants to his office equipment. He commenced the drafting of Ebullient Rhubarb #1, its masthead proclaiming: 'Anarchy: Now With 20% More Papercuts!'

Silas's newly organized desk, a testament to his evolving intellectual landscape, contained: a manifesto titled 'Kill Your Television. Then Watch It Die.'; a receptacle

labeled 'Regret (2016 Election Edition, Plus 2020)'; and a rubber duck adorned with a crown, designated 'Kafka's Heir.'
The final line, as per the Wrightian Oracle: 'All quests end where they begin. But sometimes, the beginning has better snacks.'

The Unhinged Liminal Revue: A Geometry of Light, Rendered

By Maria Albinson

The air in Pleuntje Hendrika Dekker's Sears mail-order house on Sycamore Street in Passaic, New Jersey, always smelled faintly of settled time and forgotten ambitions. At eighty-seven, Pleuntje moved through its peculiar angles with the slow, deliberate grace of a planet in a dying orbit, each step a meticulous observation. The house itself, a phantom limb of a long-shuttered factory, was a stage set for the absurd – a perpetually almost-arriving train station, a clinic where no one is ever called. The light, filtering through the grime of panes that had known a century of industry, painted shifting, unanswerable questions on the peeling wallpaper.

Pleuntje's gaze was fixed on a single particle, caught in a shaft of late afternoon sun. It danced, a miniscule, indifferent universe, its trajectory dictated by currents unseen. Its existence, she mused, was both profound and utterly meaningless. *What is the precise velocity of nothingness?* she might have wondered, though the words were unuttered, a silent hum in the quietude.

A percussive thud rattled the front door, followed by a series of rapid, uneven knocks. The stillness fractured. Then, the door swung inward to reveal Jeff Trembley, a sixty-year-old whirlwind of kinetic energy from next door. His face was framed by oversized yellow star sunglasses, perched precariously on his nose, and a child's superhero cape, secured with a safety pin, billowed slightly behind him. "Pleuntje!" he boomed, a voice

too loud for the hushed interior. "Just saw the mailman! Did he bring anything good? Or just bills from the Cosmic Utilities Board?"

Pleuntje's only response was a slow, deliberate blink. The particle continued its dance. Jeff, unperturbed, launched into a breathless monologue about a particularly vibrant dandelion he'd seen on the sidewalk. "You know, they say dandelions are just weeds, but if you look *really* close, Pleuntje, they're like tiny suns. Portable suns! Think of the implications for cold fusion!" He gestured wildly, his sunglasses glinting. Pleuntje's attention, however, had already returned to the intricate web of a forgotten spider in the corner of the ceiling.

Later that week, at the Passaic Public Library, a place where the scent of aging paper triggered cascades of fragmented memories for Pleuntje. Her fingers, gnarled but still precise, traced the embossed covers of a forgotten linguistics text, its weight a familiar comfort. For Pleuntje, the book wasn't just a container for words; it was a tactile echo of a time when the Art Institute of Buffalo and Briarcliff College were vibrant hubs of learning, not just names on a closed list. She recalled a specific scent – the faint metallic tang of lithography ink, mingling with the sweet, synthetic smell of her Briarcliff dorm room. A wave of a melancholy, reminiscent of a Czech Máj generation poem about fleeting beauty, passed over her. The precise configuration of the library's fluorescent lights, casting harsh, indifferent shadows, seemed to distort her recollections, making them as raw and abstract as Czech Informel painting.

Jeff, meanwhile, was a blur of motion in the adjacent aisle. He returned, arms laden with obscure books on early photographic processes and a brightly illustrated children's book about a grumpy badger. "Look at this, Pleuntje!" he exclaimed, holding up a volume on the history of photographic plates. "The chemical reactions! The silver halides! It's like alchemy, but with light! Did you know, these old processes, they were almost like capturing ghosts? Pure magic, really." He paused, looking at her. "You know, you could do a whole series of 'paintings' just on the way light decays on surfaces. Like that old cabinet in your parlor. It's just... *begging* for an intervention."

Pleuntje looked at the book in his hand, then at the particles swirling in the library's artificial light. The whisper of something being torn apart, of concepts breaking down, resonated with the closing of her old colleges.

The initial absurdity of Jeff's presence, previously contained, began to escalate. He'd discovered Pleuntje's notebooks – not the philosophical ones, but the meticulous diagrams of light refraction, the precise color studies of rust on a discarded nail, the architectural sketches of her own home's eccentricities. He insisted these were her "paintings," her "changing point of view."

"Pleuntje," he declared one afternoon, perched on a slightly wobbly stool in her living room, a red plastic lobster bib tied incongruously around his neck, "these aren't just notes. This is art! This is the raw data of existence, meticulously cataloged! And we, my dear, are going to publish it!" He held up a dollar store magnifying glass, examining a faint pencil line on one of her sketches as if it held the key to the universe.

The idea of her precise observations, devoid of narrative, being "published" was a jarring, almost surreal proposition for Pleuntje. Yet, Jeff's enthusiasm, like some strange, benevolent gravitational field, was impossible to completely ignore. Objects in her house seemed to subtly shift in response to his presence; a particular vase, usually dull, seemed to gleam with a new, almost sentient light when he spoke about it. The mundane became imbued with a quiet magic.

One evening, after Jeff had finally left, taking his boisterous energy with him, a profound quiet settled over the Sears house. Pleuntje found herself standing in the doorway of her empty study, the faint, lingering scent of Jeff's cheap cologne mixing with the house's accustomed aroma. The light from the single bare bulb hanging overhead cast long, distorted shadows that stretched and contracted with an unsettling beauty.

She observed the film on her mahogany desk, a landscape of minute hills and valleys. Each grain, each almost imperceptible scratch on the polished surface, told a story not of human endeavor, but of the relentless, indifferent passage of time. The silence was not empty but filled with the myriad tiny sounds of the house itself – the settling of

timbers, the faint hum of old wiring, the almost inaudible sigh of glass cooling in its frame. It was a moment of uncanny pause, the boundary between her own internal world and the external chaos of Jeff's interventions becoming blurred, indistinguishable. The liminality was not just a stage, but a quiet, omnipresent character.

"We don't order 500 of these at a time," Jeff explained, his fingers dancing over the keyboard of Pleuntje's computer. He was at her kitchen table, the screen illuminating his face, now framed by bright pink Dollar Tree heart sunglasses. He leaned in, his voice a rapid-fire explanation of digital files and online platforms. "It's Print on Demand. Each one for each customer. If they want one, they get one. If they want two, they get two."

Pleuntje, observing the frantic dance of his fingers on the keyboard, felt a faint sense of detachment. "Well, I wouldn't," she murmured, her gaze fixed on the subtle reflections in the screen – the faint outline of her own aged face, a ghostly presence. "That would be vanity publishing, which I abhor."

Jeff rolled his eyes, a theatrical gesture that stretched the heart-shaped frames of his sunglasses. "Pleuntje, it's under my private printing label, so *I'm* publishing it. Point is, they make one for each customer. If they want one, they get one. If they want two, they get two." He gestured emphatically at the screen, then at the empty space above it, as if conjuring invisible customers.

"What if they don't want any?" she asked, her voice a quiet murmur, almost lost in the whir of the computer fan. The question hung in the air, a sliver of unexpected clarity. The narrative fractured, the precise focus on the screen breaking down into abstract pixels. The raw, almost grotesque truth of creation, of putting something into the world that might be utterly ignored, felt like a sudden, jarring revelation. A sense of something torn apart, the fragile boundary of her precise observations confronting the vast indifference of the outside world.

Jeff paused, his fingers hovering over the keyboard. He looked at Pleuntje, his pink heart sunglasses reflecting the screen's light. A beat of silence. Then, a triumphant grin spread across his face. "Then they suck," he sang, his hands moving to a Brazilian Bossa Nova.

“Then they suuuuck, da-da-da-da-da...” Jeff trailed off and plunged back into the digital realm, already moving on to the next task. The truth, such as it was, was less a discovery and more a new, more profound question about the nature of engagement and indifference.

The Print on Demand book, "The Geometry of Light," materialized weeks later. A thin volume, its cover a stark, almost clinical photograph of a light-dappled windowpane. It contained Pleuntje's precise descriptions, her "paintings" of light and shadow, and her meticulously drawn diagrams of rust patterns and peeling paint. No narrative. No plot. Just the raw, undiluted data of observation.

Jeff, standing next to her as she held the book, looked immensely pleased. "See? I told you. Pure genius." He was wearing glowing green alien eyes sunglasses now. "And you know," he mused, "both our colleges, The Granton Institute of Technology and Sleeper's College, they're gone. Closed their doors. Just like your Art Institute of Buffalo and Briarcliff. We were too good for them! They couldn't handle our genius!" He threw his head back and laughed, a bright, uninhibited sound that momentarily filled the quiet Sears house.

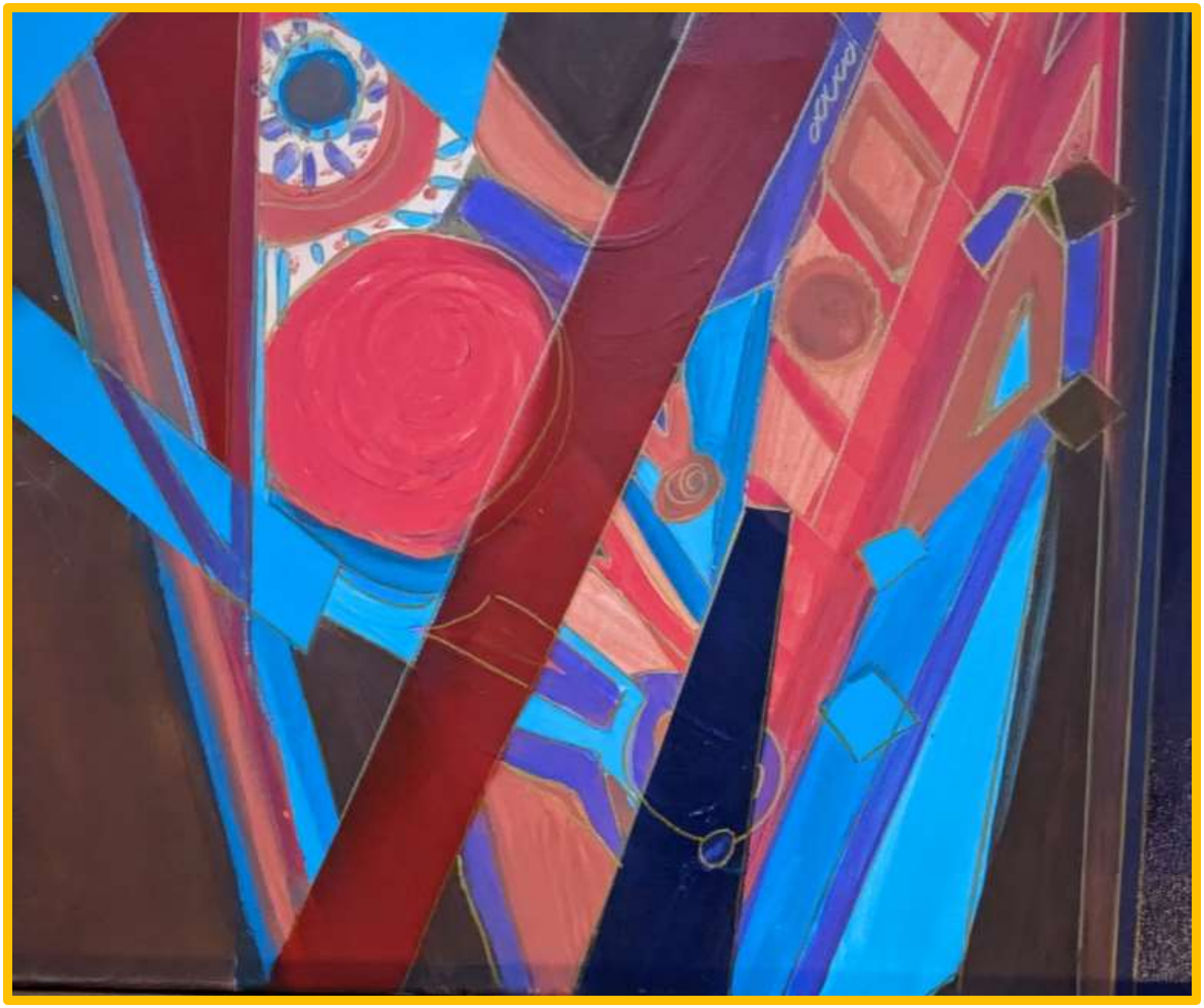
Pleuntje said nothing. Her gaze was fixed on the delicate imprint of her fingerprint on the book’s smooth, slightly cool cover. It was a record of contact, a silent, ephemeral truth. She heard a distant train whistle, a mournful, drawn-out sound that carried the weight of history and the promise of endless, aimless journey. The particles in the air, oblivious to the book, continued their quiet dance, eternal and unread. The light began to fade, leaving the room in a state of deepening ambiguity, a beautiful, unfinished symphony of observation.

6 PAINTINGS BY GRACE CAVALIERI

For Eva Brann

(1924-2025)

I drove by your house
today and thought I'd leave
a casserole on your front step
then you'd say wait I have socks
drying in the oven. In the Navy I had friends
leave every year, as if their houses were boarded up.
I wanted to see if they threw your ratty welcome mat
drying in the sun, hung over the railing left there year after year
And it was gone.
The good thing about the Navy is every year we got a new assignment.
-- Grace Cavalieri



The following has been approved by Good Housekeeping, The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), and The Brain Injury Association of America. Now what were we talking about? Oh, yes. You can read this and not likely get arrested. It won't say much about your taste, but it's not like it matters at this point. Enjoy!

THE MENDACIOUS MEMOIRS: "BUHSWEET"

By THE Galactic Guild of Gaping Gumballs & the Federation of Fantastical Flamingos

Presented as a live podcast, featuring Narrator A (The Romantic Idealist) and Narrator B (The Grumpy Realist), with intermittent interjections from a third voice: The Witness, a sardonic ex-resident of Neversink.

Narrator A (Reginald): "In the hushed corridors of Fishkill's nursing home, where time folds like origami, a man named Ken encountered a riddle wrapped in a whisper. 'Buhsweet,' he murmured, a syllable as fragile as a moth's wing. To the untrained ear, it was madness. But Ken, that sensitive soul, sensed a map. A pilgrim's map, etched in the cracks of dementia."

Narrator B (Brenda): "(He sensed a map? More like a glitch in the system. The guy's a tech, not a seer. And 'Buhsweet'? Sounds like a typo. Probably 'Bittersweet,' which is a real town. Flooding? Reservoir? Yeah, that's a thing. You know, when progress drowns a place so it can't complain.)"
Narrator A: "Ken, ever the archivist of the overlooked, sought answers. The head nurse, a woman of quiet wisdom, spoke of Bittersweet—a town swallowed by water, its bones now a fishbowl for minnows. 'He's from there,' she said. 'Just... not anymore.'"
Narrator B: "(She said 'just not anymore'? That's not a thing. Towns don't not exist. They're just... underwater. And the patient's not from there. He's a resident. A former resident? Maybe. But Ken's treating this like a Sherlock Holmes case. 'Take me home,' he says. Home? The man's been in a bed for six months. Where's the 'home'? The fridge? The TV?)"
Narrator A: "On the eve of his passing, the patient's voice cracked like a thunderclap. 'Take me home.' Ken, that tender-hearted engineer of the soul, asked, 'Where's home?' And the man, with the clarity of a dying star, whispered: '17 Maple Lane.'"
Narrator B: "(17 Maple Lane? That's not a street. That's a joke. Maple Lane's a cul-de-sac in Neversink. Or was. Now it's a swamp. And the patient's not telling Ken where he's from. He's inventing a place. Because that's what dementia does. It turns people into poets. Or liars. Or both.)"
Narrator A: "Ken, undeterred by the fog of logic, rallied his roommate, Chuck—'Two Buck'—and a diver from Neversink, a man named Elias, whose name rhymed with 'melancholy.' Together, they descended into the belly of the reservoir, where Bittersweet's ghosts bobbed like kelp. The water was a cathedral of silence, and there, beneath the silt, they found it: a foundation, a porch, the skeleton of a house. Ken's hand brushed the wall, and for a moment, the past pressed against his fingers."
Narrator B: "(A foundation? A porch? You mean a pile of bricks? And the 'skeleton of a house'? It's a ruin, Reg. A rotting one. And Ken's hand? It's probably covered in algae. But no, he's 'touching the past.' Because that's what people do when they're desperate for meaning. They grab at shadows and call them truth.)"
Narrator A: "The diver, Elias, muttered a prayer. The water was cold, but Ken's heart burned. He had done it. He had bridged the chasm between the living and the drowned. The patient's final words were not a delusion—they were a beacon. A message from a town that refused to be forgotten."

Narrator B: "(A message? It's a message from a dead town? You're making this up. The patient didn't say 'message.' He said 'Buhsweet.' And Ken's the one who transliterated it. 'Buhsweet' becomes 'Bittersweet' becomes '17 Maple Lane'—which doesn't exist. But Ken's too busy weeping over a pile of rocks to notice. And the diver? He's just there to make the story look epic.)"

The Witness (a grizzled Neversink local): "Look, I've swam those waters. Maple Lane? It's a myth. The reservoir's a graveyard. But if you're gonna chase ghosts, at least bring a flashlight. And a wetsuit."

Narrator A: "Ken returned to the nursing home, his soul heavy with the weight of a thousand unspoken stories. The patient was gone, but his voice lingered—a hymn in the static. Ken, that humble technician, had become a pilgrim. A guardian of the forgotten. And in the end, wasn't that the truest kind of home?"

Narrator B: "(A pilgrim? He's a guy who spent a day in a wetsuit. And 'guardian of the forgotten'? The patient's a resident. The town's a flood zone. But sure, let's call it 'the truest kind of home.' It's poetic. Now, can we get back to the real story? The one where Ken's just a guy who needed a hobby?)"

Narrator A (softly): "Perhaps the greatest truth is this: We are all from somewhere. Even when the maps are washed away, the heart remembers."

Narrator B (grumbling): "(And the heart's a terrible cartographer. But hey, if it makes you feel better...)"

The Corner of Bleeker & MacDougal: A Nut's Confessional Cantos X 3

By Izak Werdheri Cokes

I. The Impasse, Rendered in Stock Tickers & Poultry Prices

She was a theorem in tweed, by the Reggio's steam – a perfect proof of *here*. Bricks: I counted them. Finite. And Bleeker, a yellow oil slick, anxieties afloat on rubber. Her eyes, wet glass, aimed for the far side, where a florist was swallowed by a bakery. Purpose? (Don't ask *me*).
"Need a hand?" I squeaked. (It wasn't a question, more like a leaky faucet.) Her hand, a wilted petal, found mine. The **WALK** sign, a cosmic punchline on a cheap screen, blinked. Ubers: metallic dung beetles. Messengers: twitchy nerves on wheels. We were parentheses around a void of forward motion.
She squeezed. An apology, inferred. The frozen trout in my freezer got it. Pound, poor Pound, did he ever dissect the semiotics of a stalled foot? The market bled three points. Chicken giblets? *Unexplainably* stable. Bleeker & MacDougal: The **epicenter** of pedestrian failure.

II. The Gale, Annotated with Pork Futures & Existential Drayden, Who Doesn't Appear in this Poem

Dusk. Tenements bruised purple, like an old eggplant. Again, the tweed enigma, near Faicco's fragrant hemorrhage. Sausage: the ghost of a pig's scream. Garlic: an inconvenient truth. Her eyes, like unread scrolls, hunted the pizza rune. Red: blood, empires, and that awful sweater Aunt Mildred made.
"A downpour of human suffering?" I offered. (My humor, a cheap umbrella in a hurricane.) A brittle smile, a hairline crack in the sidewalk of her soul. **GREEN** light: a

momentary truce. Step. *Thud.* A metal spear, wielded by a sweating brute – seltzer, the *fizz* of everything going wrong. It cleaved our almost-journey. "Oh dear," she whispered, a poem of polite despair.
Back to the curb. **DON'T WALK**: a municipal thunderclap. MacDougal: a San Andreas Fault in my personal narrative. Lowell knew this quake. "My mind was a madhouse and the lock was gone." Did he ever factor in rogue hand trucks? Pork bellies *up.* My own belly, a sloshing vat of self-pity.

III. The Vanishing, Cross-Referenced with Tabloid Headlines & Thermodynamic Laws

Cold wind: entropy's invisible hand. Sky: denim, unwashed. Despair's fabric. She, by the flapping newsprint, screaming of alien babies and celebrity splits. Her headscarf: a faded guess about floral arrangements. Searching: for what? Keys? God? My own missing marbles?
"Round three?" My voice, a needle stuck on a scratched record. A flicker in her eyes – recognition of my epic losing streak? Or just the glare of oncoming headlights?
GREEN. A momentary black hole in the traffic. "Now!" I urged, touching her elbow – bone and a whisper of something like... hope.
Then, the tourists. A flesh tsunami from the laughter factory. Selfies: freezing the exact nanosecond of my latest defeat. Human Brownian motion, uncaring, chaotic. When the wave receded, only air remained. She had *dematerialized.* Gone, like a half-remembered dream or a forgotten line from *The Cantos.* Bleeker just swallowed her. MacDougal kept flowing, indifferent to my tiny, granular failures. The thermodynamic laws of pedestrian crossing, for me, remain *eternally* unresolved.

TIVE
CIONE

THE BALLAD of DIRK SHEPHERD:
A Histamine-Hazed Ghazal of Repossession and Revelation

By Devan Hudnall

The breath of Houston, a floral miasma, a very Trojan horse of pollen,
clings to Dirk "Dutch" Shepherd's throat, a persistent, itching lament.
Wherefore the agony, O Muse of the bronchial tree?

He opens that manilla envelope with a claw, a Texas-sized yawn,
inside: "instructions" in three languages—Latin, Spanish,
and the language of the damned.

He tastes the invisible dust, the spectral pollen,
even in slumber's brief reprieve,
a gritty halo around his dreams, which are of altitudes tragically sterile.
Oh, the dreams of clean air, unburdened by Earth's floral vengeance!

The paper's got no words but that one word, "instructions,"
like a ghost in a ghost town,
and the sky's a wide-open wound,
but he's got a sneeze in his pocket and a plan.
He unspools himself from sheets, threadbare relics of repose,
a man carved from quiet dread and lists, meticulously itemized.
Lest chaos prevail, let the checklist be our guiding star!

The envelope's got a tear, a rusted hinge, a story in the creases,
and the word "instructions" is a riddle, a code, a prayer to the void.
The air filter, that humming white angel in his apartment's sanctuary,
sings its perpetual, exquisitely futile hymn against the microscopic.
How vain the struggle, when the enemy is legion and unseen!

The filter's got a name, "The Holy One," but it's just a fan with a face,
and the pollen's a rebel army, and Dutch's got a hankie and a curse.
But the sky calls, a promise of blue, a vast, open wound of nothingness,
where the allergens, those airborne Furies, thin to whispers.
Behold, the azure domain where man may breathe, if but for a fleeting moment!

The sky's a big ol' lie, but he's got a F-150 and a heart full of grit,
and the word "instructions" is a map, a compass, a road to nowhere.
Today, a Gulfstream, sleek as a shark's unspoken thought, a modern leviathan,
somewhere over forgotten cornfields, a ghost on radar, an owner's last, desperate lie. Thus is the flight of deception, swift and cunning in its retreat!

The plane's got a name, "The Last Chance," but it's just a tin can with wings,
and the word "instructions" is a prayer, a curse, a hymn to the unmoored.
Dutch knows its precise weight, the murmur of its engines, the singular gleam of its polished fuselage,
he knows the velocity of deceit, the parabolic arc of a failed promise. For truth, though delayed, shall find its reckoning in the vast expanse!

The engines' roar is a lullaby, the fuselage a shrine, the sky a blank page,
and the word "instructions" is a spark, a flame, a flicker in the dark.
He straps into the F-150, his mobile fortress, a modern chariot of recovery,
antihistamines, a chalky, bitter sacrament for the journey.
Verily, the path of the just is fraught with allergens and pharmaceutical aids!

The seat's got a dent, the radio's got a static, the road's a long, lonesome trail,
and the word "instructions" is a whisper, a scream, a song in the night.

The dashboard compass spins, a mad eye,
seeking true north in a world of relative truths,
he sees the world in molecular detail:
the metallic tang of anxiety, the sweet exhalation of privet.
Ah, the bitter taste of truth, known only to the finely attuned palate!
The compass points to a ghost, the world's a jumble of lies and lies,
and the word "instructions" is a key, a lock, a door that's always closed.
Later, in the pristine, clinical void of the lab, a sacred precinct of sensation,
he will dip a spoon into the unholy essence of a new, artificial blueberry.
And thus, the artificial shall be weighed against the primal, the authentic
against the contrived!

The blueberry's a joke, a lie, a sweet sin, but the lab's got a soul,
and the word "instructions" is a hymn, a dirge, a prayer to the unmoored.
His tongue, a battlefield, will discern the exact decimal point of phoniness,
the synthetic ghost of a flavor that never was.
What bitter fruit this, from the garden of industrial ingenuity!

The decimal's a number, the flavor's a lie, the garden's a graveyard,
and the word "instructions" is a seed, a root, a vine that climbs the sky.
His curse becomes his scepter, his torment, a tool of divine discernment,
a chronic affliction transmuted into a singular acuity.
From suffering, behold, a new faculty is born, sharp as a surgeon's blade!

The blade's a razor, the acuity's a gift, the suffering's a song,
and the word "instructions" is a hymn, a psalm, a gospel of the unmoored.
The sky, however, is his purest canvas, a celestial tabula rasa,
up there, among the stratospheric currents, he is almost clean, almost whole.
For in the great void, there is solace, a momentary escape from the
Earth's tenacious embrace!

The void's a blank, the sky's a lie, but the wind's got a voice,
and the word "instructions" is a whisper, a scream, a hymn of the unmoored.

The scent of jet fuel, a paradoxical balm, a perfume of escape,
he is the pollen alchemist, transmuting agony into altitude.
Oh, the strange alchemy of modern man,
finding solace in the very engines of flight!

The engines' roar is a prayer, the fuel's a balm, the sky's a blank page,
and the word "instructions" is a spark, a flame, a hymn of the unmoored.
Hunting iron birds, and breathing, finally,
a precarious, exhilarating, lungful of absence,
a solitary figure against the vast indifference of the firmament.
Such is the lot of the seeker, forever poised between the heavens and the dust!

The firmament's a joke, the dust's a truth, but the sky's got a song,
and the word "instructions" is a hymn, a psalm, a gospel of the unmoored.

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